

Nursery Rhymes and Fairytales ENA 20240721

Nursery Rhymes and Fairytales might seem like a meaningless and unimportant thing, but they play important roles in our lives.

First, culture is that which is held in common by a people. In that way, Nursery Rhymes and Fairy Tales form the bedrock of our culture. These are common stories told to all of us when we are young.

Second, as literature, Nursery Rhymes and Fairytales also help children develop meaning, understanding and expectations of the world around them.

Focusing just on fairy tales, they often start with a major conflict, identify who the players are, what their roles, desires and expectations are and show how a conflict becomes resolved.

But, they do so in forms that captures and enraptures children's attention.

Many fairy tales are truly terrifying stories: but they show individuals dealing with and overcoming adversity.

Hansel and Gretel

Take Hansel and Gretel, for example. In this story, a family is very poor and a famine arrives. The family cannot feed their children. In the story, their step mother tells the father to abandon the children; he is very reluctant to do so. When the stepmother attempts to abandon the children, Hansel having heard his parents talking about abandoning them, drops little pebbles along the trail in order to find his way home. They find their way home. This angers the stepmother.

In fairytale stories, the instigator of negative events is a non-blood relative or associate. This tells children that blood relatives will be more concerned and considerate of you. Therefore, family and blood relations is important.

The stepmother in the story is angered that the children return and she takes them out into the forest again. This time, not having pebbles, Hansel uses bread crumbs from bread given by the stepmother to record the path home. Walking through the forest, dropping crumbs, Hansel hopes to get home again. But, birds have been eating the bread crumbs and so Hansel and Gretel are unable to get home. They are lost, separated and in a conflicted situation.

They are separated from their home. But the children keep up their hope to get home. Again the understanding that Home is Safe and Important is reminded to the children hearing the story.

After a bad witch tries to kill the children, the children eventually kill her, find her rich hoard of jewels and gems, making them rich and they head home. When home, they find that the stepmother has died, the father has been lamenting the loss of the children, they are welcomed and safe, and the Witches hoard has made them rich enough to eat as a family.

At its heart, this is a simple story of encountering and overcoming hardship, finally being able to find riches and safety.

Although cruel in their basics, stories like this warn children that there are evil hazards in the world and that family and home are safe. It tells children to keep up their hope to find a home and they can find safety, happiness, wealth and hope.

Nursery Rhyme: Hey Diddle

Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.[2]

It is a simple little rhyme, but there is evidence that this rhyme goes back a thousand years. In a pre-literate society, little rhymes like this help people understand when key natural events occur.

One significant interpretation of this rhyme is that "various constellations such as Leo the cat, Lyra the fiddle, Taurus the cow, Canis Minor the little dog, and Great Bear and Little Bear (the Big and Little Dippers, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor) which align with the Moon around the winter solstice;[10]"

The Cat is the constellation of Leo
The Fiddle is the constellation Lyra
The Cow is Taurus
The Little Dog is Canis Minor

When aligned with the Moon, this rhyme informs pre-literate farmers when to identify the solstice, and help them know when to start counting down towards planting season.

Georgie Porgey Pudding and Pie

Finally, even simple rhymes like:

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie,
Kissed teh girls and made them cry,
When the girls came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away.

But, the lyrics were changed to:

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie,
Kissed the girls and made them cry,
When the boys came out to play,
Georgie Porgie ran away.

It is believed that the "girls came out to play" was changed to "boys came out to play" at the same time that there were public scandels. Specifically Georgie Peorgie is linked to British historical figures, specifically, George Villiers. George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, was a known womanizer who was known to court high-born women and then leave them. He got into legal trouble over some of these, so in this way, he "kissed the girls" and made them cry." But, when he was caught by "the boys," and he "ran away." "Running away" is a cowardly act. Nursery rhymes like this were often sung and told to reflect key social and political figures and events who were mocked and satired by nursery rhyme-like taunts.

So, nursery rhymes can be more than cute songs and poems. They can embody significant historical and cosmic knowledge in a way that is highly memorizable.

Again, as some of the first literature many children are introduced to, these form

a bedrock of common knowledge, experience and culture.

Finally, for those interested in looking into fairy tales and nursery rhymes, Tina has an online archive of hundreds of PDF books on just about everything that is available. Ask her for something and she'll have it.